

# **\*\*ATTENTION\*\***

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**Yellow-billed Cuckoo**

*Coccyzus americanus*

**Range:**

A rare breeding species in deciduous, riparian woodlands from southern British Columbia south through California to western Mexico, and east from southern Idaho through western Colorado and western Texas. Winters throughout much of South America east of the Andes (USFWS 1985).

**Washington Distribution:**

Formerly Washington, but disappeared from its breeding range in the 1930's (Roberson 1980). Five sightings have been reported since 1934 from Grant, Okanogan, King, Snohomish and Benton Counties. A 1990 breeding record for the Grande Ronde River in Oregon indicates that cuckoos could be nesting along the Washington section of this river as well.

**Habitat Requirements:**

Yellow-billed cuckoos generally nest in deciduous woodlands associated with riparian and wetland habitats. In California, this species has been found in dense willow-cottonwood forests and marshy bottomlands with scattered thickets of willows (Gaines and Laymon 1984), and in orchards (Laymon 1980). Nests are built on horizontal branches located 1.2m-4.5m (4 - 15') above the ground (Laymon 1980, Jewitt et al. 1953).

Dense foliage, especially within 9m (30') of the ground is a more important habitat component than tree height or dispersion. Yellow-billed cuckoos use saplings 1.8m-9m (6' - 30') in height as well as old-growth trees 9m-24m (30' - 80') tall in California (Gaines and Laymon 1984). This species apparently requires larger tracts of habitat compared to other birds of comparable size. Gaines (1974 in Gaines and Laymon 1984) found very few cuckoos in California where riparian vegetation was less than 91m (300') wide and under 10 ha (4 acres) in area.

Yellow-billed cuckoos feed exclusively on insects. In California, Laymon (1980) found cuckoos preferred large, green food items, such as katydids and sphinx moth larva; foraging was observed in riparian areas and orchards. Nolan and Thompson (1975) found that cuckoos in Indiana fed heavily on cicadas and timed their nesting around cicada eruptions in years of periodic outbreaks.

The breeding season for yellow-billed cuckoos in California is from mid-June to mid-August. Availability of food during this time may limit this species.

Yellow-billed cuckoos do not establish breeding territories, a behavior which may allow birds from different nests to share in food that is locally available for a limited time period (Laymon 1980).

**Limiting Factors:**

Unknown in Washington. Availability of riparian habitat and food appear to limit yellow-billed cuckoos in California (Laymon 1980).

#### Management Recommendations:

Suitable riparian habitat should be surveyed to determine where cuckoos nest in Washington. When these areas are identified, the following management recommendations should be applied. Do not remove riparian vegetation where yellow-billed cuckoos occur. Cuckoo habitat areas should be a minimum of 4 ha (10 acres) in size (Gaines and Laymon 1984). Within riparian habitats, this species may nest in early to mid-successional vegetation and forage in late successional vegetation. Therefore, activities such as bank stabilization and channelization projects, which alter normal plant succession in riparian woodlands should not occur in known cuckoo habitats (Laymon 1980).

Long term livestock grazing reduces the structural diversity and density of riparian vegetation, resulting in a simplified habitat incapable of supporting many bird species (USFWS 1985). Where yellow-billed cuckoos are found, riparian areas should be fenced to prevent livestock from altering the existing habitat.

Prohibit insecticide spraying in riparian corridors used by cuckoos (USFWS 1985, Gaines and Laymon 1985). To avoid accidental wind drift into riparian areas, aerial application of pesticides should not occur on adjacent lands when winds exceed 9.6 km (six miles/hour). Insecticides should not be applied between June 15 and August 15 to agricultural sites where yellow-billed cuckoos forage (Laymon 1980).

#### References:

Gaines, D. and S.A. Laymon. 1984. Decline, status and preservation of the yellow-billed cuckoo in California. *Western Birds* 15(2):49-80.

Jewitt, S.G., W.P. Taylor, W.T. Shaw, and J.W. Aldrich. 1953. *Birds of Washington State*. Univ. Washington Press, Seattle.

Laymon, S.A. 1980. Feeding and nesting behavior of the yellow-billed cuckoo in the Sacramento Valley. California Department of Fish and Game Administrative Report 80-2, Job IV-1.42.

Nolan, V. and C.F. Thompson. 1975. The occurrence and significance of anomalous reproductive activities in two North American non-parasitic cuckoos, *Coccyzus* spp. *Ibis* 117:496-503.

Roberson, D. 1980. *Rare birds of the West Coast*. Woodcock Publications, Pacific Grove, CA. 496 pp.

U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service. 1985. Sensitive species management plan for the western yellow-billed cuckoo. USDI U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Region 1.

Key Points:

Habitat Requirements:

- Deciduous riparian/wetland woodlands (large tracts).
- Diet-insects.

Management Recommendations:

- Retain existing and potential habitat, > 10 acre blocks.
- Fence to exclude livestock.
- Avoid bank stabilization and channelization.
- Avoid insecticide use.